

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) Apparatus for supporting loads from a vessel at sea using fibre rope, said apparatus including a tensioning device mounted ~~substantially vertically~~ used to grip the fibre rope, said tensioning device supporting the load and facilitating the paying out and hauling in of the rope; wherein said tensioning device comprises multiple units mounted around the fibre rope axis, each having at least one contact pad for engaging the fibre rope over a corresponding part of its circumference; and wherein each contact pad has a curved contact surface whose radius of curvature is substantially greater than the radius at which the pad is arranged to engage the rope.

2-3 Cancelled.

4. (Currently Amended) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 [[2]] wherein the or each contact pad has a curved contact surface which subtends an angle of arc substantially less than one whole circle divided by the number of units mounted around the fibre rope axis.

5. (Currently Amended) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 [[3]] wherein there are provided three units whose contact surfaces when brought together form a shape that is substantially triangular with sides curved outwards.

6. (Currently Amended) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 [[3]] wherein there are provided four units whose contact surfaces when brought together form a shape that is substantially square with sides curved outwards.

7. (Currently Amended) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 [[2]] wherein each unit of the tensioning device comprises a plurality of segments connected to form a continuous track.

8. (Currently Amended) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 [[2]] wherein said tensioning device comprises at least one clamp mounted so as to be movable under load in the direction of the rope axis.

9. (Original) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 8 wherein there are provided two clamps which are operable to move relative to each other in a sequential manner upwardly and downwardly, and to hand over the grip on the rope from one clamp to the other so as to achieve continuous movement of the rope and load.

10. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said tensioning device has a form and features suitable for pipe laying operations, but provided with shoes specially adapted for the characteristics of the fibre rope.

11. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 wherein a storage reel for said fibre rope is arranged such that substantially the entire load in the fibre rope is taken by said tensioning device.

12. (Original) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 11 operable such that some back-tension is maintained on the reel for control of the rope.

13. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the tensioning device is mounted so as to suspend the rope from beside the vessel.

14. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the tensioning device is mounted so as to suspend the rope via a moonpool.

15. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 wherein contact pads of said tensioning device are made deformable.

16. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 wherein arrays of contact elements of said tensioning device on opposite sides of the rope axis are staggered so as to induce snaking of the rope under radial gripping pressure.

17. (Previously Presented) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 1 in combination with a rope having stoppers embedded in the rope at intervals along its length.

18. (Original) Apparatus as claimed in Claim 17 wherein gripping elements of the tensioning device having spacing corresponding to said stoppers.

19. (Currently Amended) A method of supporting a load from a vessel at sea using fibre rope wherein a tensioning device is mounted ~~[[is]]~~ substantially vertically to said vessel and used to grip the fibre rope, said tensioning device supporting the load and facilitating the paying out and hauling ~~[[y-in]]~~ in of the rope.

20. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 19 wherein substantially the entire load in the fibre rope is taken by said tensioning device, and parts of the rope under tension are not diverted substantially from vertical.

21. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 20 wherein some back-tension is maintained on the reel for control of the rope.

22. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in Claim 19, wherein the tensioning device is adapted as claimed in Claim 1 ~~[[3]]~~.

23. Cancelled.

24. (Currently Amended) A [Gripping] gripping arrangement for a fibre rope wherein there is provided a plurality of contact pads, said pads being arranged longitudinally and circumferentially disposed around the fibre rope axis and wherein ~~[[the]]~~ a contact area of each pad is curved and ~~[[the]]~~ a radius of curvature of ~~[[the]]~~ a contact surface of each pad is substantially greater than the radius at which the pad is arranged to engage the rope.

25. (Currently Amended) A [Gripping] gripping pad arrangement, as claimed in Claim 24, ~~for a fibre rope wherein there is provided a plurality of pads, said pads being arranged longitudinally and circumferentially around the fibre rope axis and wherein the contact area of each pad is curved and the~~ wherein an angle of arc ~~suspended by~~ are ~~[[the]]~~ a curved surface of each pad is substantially less than one whole circle divided by the number of ~~units~~ pads.

26. (Currently Amended) A [Gripping] gripping pad arrangement as claimed in claim 25 wherein there are provided groups of three pads arranged around the fibre rope axis to form, when brought together, a shape that is substantially triangular with sides curved outwards.

27. (Currently Amended) A [Gripping] gripping pad arrangement as claimed in claim 25 wherein there are provided four pads arranged to form, when brought together, a shape that is substantially square with sides curved outwards.